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That these stories, as well as the entire funeral ritual, serve several purposes is recognized by the *tao shih* and many of the villagers. First, the stories tend to stress the importance of filial piety and morality. They teach the villagers that "Parents should love but not spoil their children, because a spoiled child becomes stupid"; "Since the parents take care of the child—the parents feed, school, and find a husband or wife for the child—the child should therefore be filial"; "People must marry, since the parents have given us our bodies and we must give the parents another body—a descendant"; "If you are unfilial to your parents, then your son will be unfilial to you, and besides that you will be punished in the underworld." Some stories emphasize the necessity for cooperation between brothers to hold the family together. These stories draw attention to the importance of filial piety, but their moral precepts are presented in such a way as to poke fun at those present whose behavior has in any way been known to be unfilial. The barbed humor is frequently directed at daughters-in-law who do not sufficiently respect their husbands' families, for example, and who therefore talk too much and so neglect their household duties and family responsibilities.

The second recognized purpose of these rituals is to provide a release for the mourners' grief. The emotional intensity of bereavement is moderated by the humorous stories told by the *tao shih*, as well as by the excitement sometimes created by the ceremonies. One *tao shih*, who also operates a small tailoring shop in Lukang, explained, "I don't really believe that the things we do in these funeral rituals actually do anything for the spirit of the dead person. But since the villagers believe in it and want it done, and will pay for the performance of such rituals, I come and do it. It makes them feel better and besides, when we perform all these exciting ceremonies and tell the funny stories, it makes them laugh and helps them forget their sadness." The extent to which the *tao shih's* opinion is valid is seen again and again during the course of the evening's events, as well as during the performance of the juggler. Often, even the most sincerely grief-stricken are unable to refrain from smiling at some of the stories and comical situations. Some stories are so filled with slapstick comedy that they bring almost hysterical laughter from the mourners.

On the trip to the underworld, the spirit of the deceased is judged. A favorable decision is inevitably reached, and the spirit is given permission to go to the Western Paradise. Once again the participating group goes outside, this time to complete the ritual with the journey to the Western Paradise. A paper sedan chair is set on the ground and an incense pot placed next to it. Then a paper puppet of the deceased, paper servants, and paper money are burned while the mourners wail.

It is nearly dawn when all of this is completed, and afterwards everyone present eats a large breakfast prepared by the village men,

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"curative and health-giving powers." Although the villagers of the Hsin Hsing area realize the importance of boiling drinking water, they will drink this holy water immediately after taking it out of the river and claim that they suffer no ill effects.

When the villagers have filled their receptacles, they depart for their own village. The *t'iao t'ung*, who is still in a trance, is carried on the top of a large sedan chair ordinarily used to transport the statues of gods. On his head is a large bandage. Although he has suffered only a superficial wound, the *t'iao t'ung's* actually cutting his head with a sword is impressive to the observers, since the blood flow increases when he dips his head into the water. All along the route homeward other villagers, already informed of the ceremonial, display sacrifices to the god who possesses the *t'iao t'ung* and bring out bottles and kettles in which to receive some of the holy water that is being transported in large barrels.

THE FUNCTIONS OF RITUAL IN HSIN HSING VILLAGE

Having examined the occasion and occurrence of many rites and rituals, we turn now to ways in which they function within the structure of village society and support it. Generally, their most obvious contribution is that participation in the ritual itself helps to relieve the anxiety of people who are desperately seeking to survive in a world of uncertainty or looking for solutions to otherwise insoluble problems. This is true whether the ritual is designed for protection or to moderate natural or supernatural disaster—illness, fire, or demonic possession—since at the very least the villager feels he is coming to grips with the problem. Other results of ritual are less obvious.

Curing rites, for example, resemble all medical practices in having useful side effects or fringe benefits beyond the actually therapeutic. Not only the patient but the whole family must be considered. The Chinese cultural focus on the family emphasizes the reciprocal responsibility of family and individual. Thus, a Taiwanese family must take advantage of every possible means to cure an ailing member or be looked down upon and criticized by the entire community for neglect, which increases the anxiety of the situation.

Therefore, when Western medicine does not work, the traditional-minded villagers turn at once to the shaman, feeling that the very failure proves that the illness is of supernatural origin. But even the skeptical families which have no firm belief in the potency of the magical rituals usually have them performed. This may be partly to avoid social censure, but, in fact, not even the most skeptical are entirely convinced that the rituals are ineffectual. Such villagers have been heard to say, "perhaps the ritual does help. And could one allow

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a member of one's family to suffer and possibly even die without trying every available means to save him?"

As is true of the curing rituals, the ritual that usually follows a fire in the village also has the important function of alleviating anxiety over this constant threat about which the villagers can do little directly. And, similarly, for another ever-present concern, the taking water ritual serves as a form of health insurance. Thus, these rituals also do much to relieve the constant anxieties of the villagers.

The psychological value of the curing rituals to the patient is very obvious. In Western society, when doctors and medicines cannot cure an illness, there is usually little room for further hope except for the minority who believe in practitioners like Oral Roberts or some other faith healer or miracle worker. In rural Taiwan, however, no one need abandon hope at this point, nor feel totally helpless in the face of the unknown. It is always possible and culturally acceptable to attribute the trouble to some supernatural cause and call in a shaman.

There is a possiblity of real psychological benefit for the patient who can be made to believe that the supernatural is truly the cause of his illness and that it is being dealt with by time-tested, traditional means. If he is, in fact, suffering from some psychosomatic illness, the reassurance that everything possible is being done can have very definite value. The shamanistic curing ritual, of course, also focuses attention on the patient. Family, friends, and villagers join together in the hope that their participation will bring about a successful cure. The attention, and the knowledge that the family has willingly assumed a heavy financial burden to have these services performed, can well give the patient a real feeling of worth and contribute to his recovery.

This kind of reaction can be seen in the case of the village girl, discussed above, who "went mad" (*ja feng le*). From the villagers' point of view the powers of the shamans, combined with the help elicited from the gods, together rid the girl of the demons that possessed her. Yet, from the Western point of view, it seems reasonable to assume that the rituals may have brought about their purpose in quite a different way—by making her a center of the attention not only of her family but the entire village, they made her conscious that the entire community valued her and hoped for her recovery. Their solicitude could therefore have relieved some of her anxieties and given her the confidence she needed to get well.

Another contributing factor is related to the very nature of the ritual which is used to exorcise demons. The vehemence of the shaman as he attempts to exorcise a demon is impressive enough to hear, but to be the object of his vehemence must be traumatic indeed. The shaman performs alone in the dimly lit house with the patient, while the family and villagers listen nervously from outside, not daring to come near for fear they will be "hit head-on by the demon" as he flees the

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shaman's magic. The awe and shock which he inspires in the patient could have actual therapeutic value, at least to the extent of bringing about temporary relief if not recovery, and may not be too dissimilar to the effect of electric shock. And fear of the "shock treatment," in either case, may provide as beneficial a result as actual recourse to the treatment.

A social function of ritual, and especially of shamanistic types of ritual, might be briefly considered here. This is its "entertainment" value in rural areas. Frequently, large numbers of people turn out to witness curing or fire rituals, which may last long into the night. They almost always regard the shaman's performance as an exciting event. Many attempt to become participants, and some in their enthusiasm and excitement may even become possessed. Most participate by merely presenting sacrifices. Frequently, large crowds come from surrounding villages to watch the often "amazing feats" carried out in the course of some shamanistic rites. In this process of drawing together for an exciting ritual event, the people gain a strong—if temporary—feeling of social cohesion. Even later, the rituals give the villagers an interesting topic to discuss and gossip about for many days. Thus, although there is little formal entertainment in rural Taiwan, the ritual act often serves to fill its place.

Even though these rituals are performed by so many villagers, it does not particularly indicate absolute faith in the supernatural. While a great number of old people still hold these beliefs without reservations, today most of the villagers express some degree of uncertainty. Generally, villagers say that "many *t'iao t'ung* are not as powerful as they used to be, and also there are some who are probably fakes, but who can really tell?" (This is a point frequently made in the past by the Japanese when they ruled Taiwan and again today by the present government through the school system.) In addition, the villagers ask, "Who can really know if the *t'iao t'ung* is possessed by a god and speaking the god's words?" But all the villagers "know from experience that life is hard," and they constantly seek ways to temper this harshness. Although their faith may not be absolute, they "would not dare merely to sit and do nothing" when a sick member of the family showed no improvement, or a child neither ate nor slept for days, or a fire destroyed someone's house. They are anxious, and their continued recourse to magical or religious rituals represents their attempt to do everything possible to allay their apprehension of the unknown.

Thus, even the most skeptical of the villagers will call on a shaman in an emergency. Though the importance of Western medicine has reduced the old primary reliance on ritual curing, social pressure as well as the desire to do everything possible if one method fails forces